

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



New artwork aims to challenge prejudices

A new exhibition opening this week brings art and academics together to tackle neighbourhood stigma.

The Stigma Research Laboratory (SRL) is an innovative arts-based strategy exploring how reputation affects people in some neighbourhoods.

Work was commissioned from three contemporary local visual artists for site-specific exhibition/installation.

The Housing and Community Research Unit (HACRU) at UTAS partnered with the UTAS School of Art, Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST) and the Moonah Arts Centre to develop the exhibition, which contains video art and photography.

The project is based in Hobart and is potentially a prototype for interventions challenging neighbourhood stigma in other parts of Tasmania and Australia.

Dr Natasha Cica, collaborative research project developer at UTAS, designed the project and put the team together.

“Innovation isn’t just something that happens behind the closed doors of science labs- SRL is a great project because it brings together academics, artists and audiences, throws in some challenging questions about social justice - and shakes them all up,” Dr Cica said.

“It shows how UTAS can exchange ideas with the community it serves, in an original and engaging way.”

The creative team is led by Mr John Vella, Head of Sculpture at UTAS’ Tasmanian School of Art.

Mr Vella’s diverse work tackles humour, beauty, status and cultural anxieties and has been exhibited locally, nationally and internationally.

His recent projects include *SCAPE* for Hydro Consulting (with Scottish artist Stephen Hurrell) and *FUME* at Devonport Regional Gallery.

The other participating artists are new-media artist Scot Cotterell, who works across the fields of installation, live audiovisual composition, moving and still imagery and Philippa Steele, an emerging installation artist who is also co-founder of the new art firm Backstory.

UTAS' Associate Professor Keith Jacobs, from HACRU, provided academic direction for the project, drawing on his strong research interest in housing stigma and social inclusion.

Assoc. Prof. Jacobs said everyone involved in SRL is interested in subverting the idea of stigma by re-imagining its usual meaning.

“One of the questions we are interested in is, can artistic endeavour transform our sense of identity?” Assoc. Prof. Jacobs said.

“We hope this project will provide some radical insights about the way we address inequality, stigma and other related social policy problems.”

The project received financial support from UTAS through its Community Engagement Start-Up Grant Scheme, supplemented by funding from CAST.

Events: Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 May, from 10am to 4pm, at MAC, 65 Hopkins St, Moonah

Special evening: Saturday 16 May 2009, from 5pm at MAC

All are welcome to these free community events.

For more information/interviews, please contact: Mr John Vella, (03) 6226 4352

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